

Edge of Humanity Magazine (<https://edgeofhumanity.com/>)

St. Stephen ‘The Iron Church’

By Edge of Humanity Magazine (<https://edgeofhumanity.com/author/eoh2014/>), December 29, 2021



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Bulgarian St Stephen Church, also known as the Bulgarian Iron Church, is a Bulgarian Orthodox church in Balat, Istanbul, Turkey. It is famous for being made of prefabricated cast-iron elements in the neo-Byzantine style. The church belongs to the Bulgarian minority in the city.

In the 19th century, Greek rituals were held in Orthodox churches in Istanbul. For this reason, Bulgarians from Istanbul wanted to establish an independent church from the Fener Greek Patriarchate in order to perform rituals in their own language, but the Patriarchate rejected this request of the Bulgarians. Thereupon, the Bulgarians wanted to leave the Greek Patriarchate and build an independent church for themselves.



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The negotiations with Sultan Abdulaziz did not allow the Bulgarians to build a church independent of the Fener Patriarchate. However, in order not to directly reject the demands of the Bulgarians, the Sultan says, “If you finish the construction of the church in three months, I will let you.” At that time, it was not possible for such a construction to be completed in three months under those conditions. An iron frame was preferred to concrete reinforcement because of the weak ground conditions. The construction plans were prepared by the Istanbul-based Ottoman Armenian architect Hovsep Aznavour.



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An international competition was conducted to produce the prefabricated cast iron parts of the church, won by an Austrian company, R. Ph. Waagner. The prefabricated elements, weighing 500 tons, were produced in Vienna from 1893 to 1896 and transported to Istanbul by ship through the Danube and the Black Sea. After one-and-a-half years, the church was completed in 1898 and inaugurated by Exarch Joseph on 8 September that year.



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Sultan Abdulaziz keeps his promise. The church becomes permanent.

The main skeleton of the church was made of steel and covered by metal boards. All the pieces were attached together with nuts, bolts, rivets, or welding. In terms of architecture, the church combines Neo-Byzantine and Neo-Baroque influences.



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See also:

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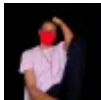
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